

## First Day Back

Dee Varshney, Acting Region Direction, Central Region

*Note: Acting Central Region Director Dee Varshney and other MARAD Central Region staff were evacuated from New Orleans for Hurricane Katrina, and set up office in Port Arthur, Texas. They evacuated Port Arthur because of Hurricane Rita. This is Dee's story about the first day back.*



*Emergency-response personnel resting aboard one of the decks of the Cape Victory.*

*Photo by Ralph J. Otolano, Jr., USN (RC)*

The day after Rita blew through, Matthew "Mac" McNally, Staff Shipping Representative; CDR Ralph Otolano, MMROCH Unit 420; and I visited MARAD's Port Arthur Office to assess the damage incurred by Hurricane Rita. Power was out and puddles of water were everywhere. The roof of the building seemed to have been damaged.

Earlier, in preparation for Hurricane Rita, we had removed almost every piece of electronic equipment, including the huge color printer, from the office and packed it in a van for safekeeping aboard the *Cape Victory* during and after the storm.

After leaving the Port Arthur Office, we managed to get to the Holiday Inn in Port Arthur where we had been holed up since Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. We wanted to pick up our clothes and belongings to take to the *Cape Victory* since the hotel was being evacuated. The hotel had lost all power

and there was no running water. The roof had been blown off in patches. The hotel manager and a guest in the hotel volunteered to take care of our Port Arthur Office mascot fish RDO (short for Regular Day Off) until we could find a more suitable temporary home for him.

We then drove to the Beaumont Reserve Fleet (BRF) in the Port of Beaumont. We had to dodge fallen poles, power lines, and occasionally had to drive in the wrong direction to avoid flooded streets and highways. Fortunately for us, there was a police cruiser in front of us. We could not get to the BRF fleet because the power was down and the gates could not be opened.

Foiled at our attempts to get to the BRF, we drove back to the Holiday Inn. While there, we assisted a guest who was stranded there. She wanted to see her house, but was afraid to drive on her own. She followed us to her house, and found the house was in good condition. She could not stay in the house due to the curfew, so she followed us to the *Cape Vincent* where she spent the afternoon.

The gates to the BRF were now open, and after dropping our new friend off at the *Cape Vincent*, we were able to get to the *Cape Victory* around 1:30 p.m. We received word that four LASH barges had broken free. Two were aground on a bank and two were sighted near Sun Oil Terminal's Dock 5. We were able to get in touch with MORAN tugs that assisted the *Capes Victory* and *Vincent* through the hurricane the previous night. MORAN Towing provided one tug around 5:00 p.m. to go and round up the loose barges. I went with one of the Navy reservists on the tug. The tug's crew was exhausted from the previous night's work, and they needed some rest, so we returned to the ships.

The Captains of *Capes Victory* and *Vincent* were most gracious hosts, and made all of us feel at home. All in all, a fairly routine day. What made returning to the ships worthwhile was the RRF crews' pets that were evacuated before the hurricane. The dogs sat in the conference rooms and, no matter when we returned, greeted us with great affection.

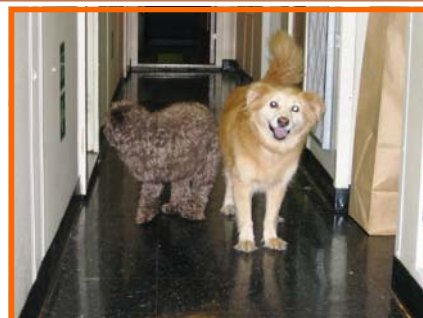
I have the best of the best helping me write a good story. MARAD and its employees can take great pride in the way MARAD assets were used to help the community here.

*Note: RDO is alive and well residing aboard the Cape Vincent until the Port Arthur Office is up and running. Plans are in the works for a big homecoming celebration for RDO.*



*The crew of Moran Towing Co. tug Mary Moran and crew members from MARAD RRF ships Cape Florida and Cape Victory wrangle barges cast adrift in the Neches River under the shadow of former U.S. Navy aircraft carrier Oriskany at the Beaumont Reserve Fleet following Hurricane Rita.*

*Photo by Louis Effa, Office of Chief Information Officer*



*Two evacuees safely aboard one of the Capes.*